



St. Lucie County Legislative Update

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Our Mission....

To provide service, infrastructure and leadership necessary to advance a safe and sustainable community, maintain a high quality of life, and protect the natural environment for all our citizens.

SCOTT CALLS FOR \$100 MILLION TO VISIT FLORIDA

Gov. Rick Scott is calling on the Florida Legislature to not just restore all funding for Visit Florida, but also give the embattled agency another \$24 million for next year.

Last week the federal government announced it would send the state \$1.5 billion additionally for hospitals to handle low-income care costs. That funding could free up state funding for other priorities like what Scott outlined over the last two days, including \$200 million for repairs to the dike around Lake Okeechobee.

His requests comes a week after the House and Senate both passed spending plans that give less to Visit Florida. The House passed a budget with just \$25 million for Visit Florida. The Senate proposed \$76 million. The chambers are now left trying to negotiate a resolution to their \$51 million divide in order to pass a state budget that both chambers can agree to.

SENATE VOTES TO KEEP SPORTS DEVELOPMENT

The program tasked with distributing state money to sports franchises for stadium improvements and construction is safe for the time being after the Senate Commerce and Tourism Committee Monday voted against a measure to repeal the program.

SB 236 by Sen. Tom Lee, R- Thonotosassa, would have repealed the Sports Development program that currently authorizes payments of state sales and use tax revenue to qualified sports teams with an annual cap of \$13 million.

The bill was ultimately defeated on a 3-3 vote with Chairman Bill Montford voting against the measure. There is an identical House bill (HB 6023), but it has yet to be heard in committee.

VACATION RENTALS BILL GUTTED IN SENATE

Legislation short circuiting local restrictions on Airbnb and other home vacation rentals was abruptly revised Monday -- confusing a committee room full of lobbyists, plus a few committee members.

Sen. Greg Steube acquiesced in a late amendment by Sen. Jeff Brandes that essentially gutted his bill. SB 188, as amended, passed on a vote of 5-3.

What emerged from the Senate Community Affairs Committee was a measure allowing local governments with existing ordinances to make them less restrictive -- say, reducing the minimum time a renter can stay; and letting them accommodate service members on active or temporary duty or disabled veterans. Except for the language regarding active military, this amendment reverts the bill to existing statute.

The bill has one more committee stop before it can be heard on the Senate floor.

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ARTILES TO BE INVESTIGATED FOR 'RACIST, SEXIST' COMMENTS

Miami Republican Sen. Frank Artiles stood on the Florida Senate floor Wednesday morning and told his colleagues he was sorry for insulting them in private using curse words and a racial slur, according to Patricia Mazzei, Steve Bousquet and Kristen M. Clark of The Times/Herald Tallahassee Bureau.

"I extend a heartfelt apology to my colleagues and to all those I have offended," Artiles began. He offered a direct apology to Sen. Audrey Gibson, a Jacksonville Democrat he had personally insulted.

Artiles acknowledged that his comments, made in private Monday night and revealed Tuesday, reflected poorly on him. He also apologized to Sen. Perry Thurston, a Fort Lauderdale Democrat who witnessed Artiles' exchange with Gibson and tried to get Artiles to reconsider his crass language before the conversation got out of hand.

Wednesday morning, Senate President Joe Negron stripped Artiles of his chairmanship of the Senate Communications, Energy and Public Utilities Committee. Negron later announced an investigation into Artiles' actions in a memo.

Senate Rules Committee Chair Lizbeth Benacquisto has appointed the chamber's top lawyer, Senate General Counsel Dawn Roberts, to investigate a complaint by next Tuesday seeking to remove Artiles from office.

HOUSE SENDS PIP REPEAL TO THE SENATE

The Florida House Wednesday OK'd HB 1063, which repeals Florida's required \$10,000 personal injury protection system, on an 89-29 vote.

Under the bill, Florida would join most other states by requiring bodily injury liability coverage to cover injuries to others, in this case \$25,000 per person and \$50,000 per accident.

A Senate bill still working its way through committees, SB 1766 by Sen. Tom Lee, R-Thonotosassa, would make similar moves but also require \$5,000 in medical payments coverage.

Rep. Erin Grall has said that requirement, known as Medpay, essentially reconstitutes PIP under another name and wipes out savings for most drivers, forcing the vast majority to duplicate medical coverage they already have from Medicare, employer plans or other sources, according to Charles Elmore of The Palm Beach Post.

Lee said it would be hard for him to support the repeal of PIP without a Medpay provision. His bill has two more committee stops to clear.

HOUSE FLOOR TO HEAR LOCAL TAX REFERENDA BILL

The House Government Accountability Committee passed legislation unanimously Wednesday that would restrict local tax ballot questions to major elections.

HB 139, carried by Rep. Blaise Ingoglia for the second year in a row, would require local discretionary sales tax referendums to only be placed on a general or primary election ballot. A super majority will be needed if the referenda is placed on a primary ballot.

An amendment adopted would require any tax questions presented on a primary ballot to be "revenue neutral," meaning the tax is offset by a reduction in another tax, according to a staff analysis.

The lower chamber is ready to hear the bill. The Senate companion (SB 278), which was similarly amended earlier this week, still has one committee stop.